



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About... Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

What is HFMD?

HFMD is caused by certain enteroviruses, and is a mild illness which affects infants and children with characteristic sores or ulcers on the mouth, hands and feet. Enterovirus 71 and coxsackie viruses are the most common causes of HFMD. HFMD is not the same as foot and mouth disease (also known as hoof and mouth disease) which is a viral disease found in farm animals.

How is HFMD spread?

HFMD is spread by direct contact with the secretions from the nose, mouth and throat of an infected person; by direct contact with the fluid from the ulcers and from contact with the stool of an infected person. The virus is most contagious during the first week of illness. Children who have blisters on their mouths and are drooling or those with weeping lesions on their hands should not attend childcare or school. Exclusion of ill persons may not prevent additional cases as the virus is excreted for several weeks after symptoms have disappeared.

More cases of HFMD occur in the late summer and early fall, although cases may occur year-round. Approximately half of all children who are infected with the virus do not show signs or symptoms of the disease, but may still be able to spread the virus.

Who is at risk for HFMD?

HFMD typically affects young children, as they are less likely to have been exposed to the disease in the past. However, cases can also occur in adults.

How do I know if I have HFMD?

The signs and symptoms of HFMD are:

- Painful red blisters on the tongue, mouth, palms of the hands, or soles of the feet
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Irritability and/or loss of appetite.

How can HFMD be treated?

There is no specific therapy available, but your health care provider may prescribe medications that make you feel more comfortable. Since antibiotics work only against bacteria, they are not given to fight this viral infection. Citrus, salty, acidic, or spicy foods should be avoided since they may cause discomfort in the area of the blisters in the mouth. Offer foods that do not need much chewing and encourage plenty of clear fluids and cold drinks. Children should rinse their mouths with warm water after meals.

How is HFMD prevented?

Good personal hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of HFMD, including good hand washing and prompt disposal of used facial tissues. Avoid close personal contact (i.e. hugging, kissing, etc.) within infected persons. Routine disinfection of contaminated surfaces, particularly in child care or school settings will reduce possible sources of infection.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website on HFMD at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/index.html>

Mayo Clinic Website on HFMD at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease/DS00599>

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